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SUBJECT: PHASE 2 VOTER REGISTRATION OFF TO A GOOD START

REF: A. KABUL 2939  
1B. KABUL 2914

11. (SBU) Phase 2 voter registration for the eight northern provinces and Paktya and Kabul provinces began November 5. The Independent Elections Commission (IEC) reported that 322 of the 326 Phase 2 sites are open. Delays in delivery of supplies prevented four sites in remote areas of Badghis province, along the northwestern border with Turkmenistan, from opening on schedule. The IEC estimates these sites will open by November 8. As expected, first-day turnout appeared to be light. IEC Deputy Chief Technical Officer Zekria Barakzai noted that Phase 2 contains large population centers, including the cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, and Gardez, and the IEC estimates as many as 1.5 million voters may register during Phase 2.

12. (SBU) Mission officers on November 5 visited a smattering of voter registration sites in Kabul city, including schools, a Ministry of Women Affairs site, and a mosque. The locations were clearly marked, fully staffed, and properly equipped. IEC officials were cognizant of voter registration procedures, including politely asking the foreign guests for their IEC observer identification cards. A PRT officer visited a voter registration center in Sheberghan, capital of Jowzjan province, and reports operations were running smoothly on opening day. The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) has organized some 350 local volunteer observers for Phase 2, as it did in Phase 1. FEFA will use recently-obtained international funding to publish a formal Phase 2 report on data compiled from its observer checklist and follow-up interviews with voters.

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SECURITY OUTLOOK GOOD  
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13. (SBU) The Afghan security forces' coordinated assessment of security for Phase 2 provinces shows almost all areas as "low threat." The analysis identifies only Paktya province and Sorobi district in Kabul as "high threat" areas. Phase 1, in contrast, contained areas "under enemy control," although no Phase 1 area reported deaths in connection with voter registration activities (REF A.) The Baghlan provincial electoral officer praises the close cooperation he has enjoyed with his security counterparts; local police thwarted a suicide bomber targeting a voter registration security planning meeting in Puhl-i-Khumri. Security coordination in Paktya and Kunduz provinces includes daily meetings. Some Kunduz IEC staff have received threats; only one of the 27 district field coordinators, however, has resigned as a result. With the assistance of the PRT, the Herat IEC has set up a small coordination center for voter registration operations.

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IEC LOGISTICS BETTER BUT NOT PERFECT  
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**¶4.** (SBU) In contrast to Phase 1 (REF B), all Phase 2 provinces received registration kits and delivered them on time to their districts, excepting the four remote districts in Badghis province. Delays in delivery of tents have left some sites operating in the open in all Phase 1 provinces; in Baghlan province (Phase 2) 50 percent of sites are without shelter until the tents arrive. Regional IEC staff and provincial electoral officers cite Thuraya satellite phones as their next greatest need.

**¶5.** (SBU) IEC field staff continue to show ingenuity in devising solutions to logistical and supply problems. In Herat, electoral officials adjusted their delivery plan to compensate for last-minute changes in site locations, whether requested by IEC headquarters, or, in one case, by local religious leaders. Herat officials compensated for materials missing from some registration kits by assigning the complete kits to remote areas and using the incomplete kits in the city, where alternatives are easier to obtain. In Archi district in Kunduz, the IEC recruited the culturally-acceptable alternative of a venerable greybeard to operate the women's registration center when no female district field coordinator could be found.

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LINKING PEACE AND DEMOCRACY  
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**¶6.** (SBU) The IEC held a press conference in the provincial electoral office of Kabul to mark the opening of Phase 2. Kabul governor Haji Din Mohammed, an ethnic Pashtun, told the media that "The time of Kalashnikovs is past" and democracy is Afghanistan's future. Other notables at the podium took up similar themes, describing elections as the way forward to peace and security, and voting as the duty of every Muslim. IEC Chief Technical Officer Daoud Ali Najafi said "these elections are directly the responsibility of every Afghan" and underlined Afghan, vice international, leadership of the electoral process. Najafi noted that popular support was key to the success of Phase 1 registration; he also congratulated the media on their important role in voter education. A similar IEC press conference took place in Herat.

**¶7.** (U) The 10 Phase 2 provinces are Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kunduz, Badghis, Faryab, Jowzjan, Samangan, Baghlan, and Paktya.

WOOD